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In Lieu of an Introduction

When we look at the photo taken in the second half of the 19th century by Ignacy Krieger on the Krakow Main Market Square at the end of Grodzka Street, we become fascinated by everything we see in the picture: the enormous slogans advertising the no more existing shops, foreign sounding names of Jewish merchants and traders, funny clothed people gathered around a wagon parked on the cobblestone street – and what is more, the cart itself is also a curious sight, a wooden ‘rafiok’ wagon that could soon be loaded with a spacious wardrobe purchased at Fuchs...



Ignacy Krieger, eastern frontage
of the Kraków Main Market Square
at the end of Grodzka Street

(Source: *Album fotografii dawnego
Krakowa z Atelier Ignacego Krie-
gera*, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza
w Krakowie, Kraków 1989, s. 34)

The decades that have passed since the snapshot had been released in an old box camera make us think of the photograph as at least as exotic as a picture of a village lying on the bank of the Amazon River. It is all alien to us, and it does not matter, whether the reason for the alienation is the time lapse or geographical distance.



Ignacy Krieger, eastern frontage of the Kraków Main Market Square at the end of Grodzka Street

(Source: *Album fotografii dawnego Krakowa z Atelier Ignacego Kriegera*, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza w Krakowie, Kraków 1989, s. 34)

Why did Krieger take this photo? There is no historical monument or a distinguished person there (besides, let us also think about the time the “actors” had to be still due to the long exposure times). The photographed image was a part of everyday routine for him. His first atelier after moving to Krakow was located in the courtyard of the 83 Grodzka Street tenement house – a few buildings away from the portrayed scene. He went past these buildings every day. He could not be surprised by the clothes of the photographed persons, or the horse drawn wagon, an ordinary means of transport at that time. For some reasons, however, Krieger photographed contemporary Krakow in an almost obsessive way, and as a result, not seen for many cities, he has “an abundant and comprehensive photographic documentation preserved on thousands of glass plates” [*Album Fotografii...*, 1989, p. 11]. He loved the city with all his heart and photographed historical monuments of Krakow as well as the residents of the city with passion and enthusiasm. He was not, however interested in – as he called it – the “great lords in old Polish split-sleeve overcoats,” but simple people he saw on the streets every day. Village girls, the wandering tinkers, carriers/porters, bakers, tradeswomen from the market, mongers, farm-hands, Gypsies, the poor Jews or the Podhale region mountaineers, so exotic on the streets of Krakow.

It is worth to look at two things here. First of all, hundreds of this type of portraits, taken in his atelier as well as on the streets of Krakow, were not there for any profit, but only to satisfy his passion for documenting the surrounding reality. Secondly, the photos of the monuments of Krakow, so obvious for us today, were not such a common and natural thing during the times of Krieger: the notion of a historic monument as precious memory of the past was only being born...

Why is this story important within the context of cultural heritage, its protection and management? We can reply in a perverse way: how many of us, in the times of virtually everybody having access to a digital camera, have taken a photo of a street sweeper in the early morning? How many of us saw the extraordinary snapshot in this seemingly ordinary image of everyday life? Who can look at this commonplace scene from the distance of the future? However, these competences are indispensable if we wish to speak of a wise approach to heritage. It is not merely the sensitivity to the past, but equally, the ability to see the contemporary in the context of the future. I am not saying here the ten or twenty years forward, but a 100 or 200. I speak of the work that the effects of we will not live to see, and we can only imagine if there is any sense to undertake it...